DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 195 619 UD 021 034

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TITLE Attitudes Toward English Vernaculars.
PUB DATE Jun 80
NOTE 29p.: Paper presented at the conference "Meeting the Educational Needs of Students Who Speak a Vernacular English in the Public School Setting" (Ann Arbor, MI, June 2-3, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Code Switching (Language): Diglossia: *English: *Language Attitudes: Language Usage: *Language Variation: *Nonstandard Dialects: *Social Discrimination: *Social Influences: Socioeconomic Status: *Sociolinguistics

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the roles and functions that English based vernaculars play in contemporary society and reviews literature pertinent to that topic. Areas considered include (1) societal behavior toward language, (2) language as a group marker, and (3) the contextual parameters of language use. In the discussion of societal behavior toward language, the means used by society to favor one variety of language over another are examined. Black English is cited as an example of a language that is accorded low prestige by the dominant society. In the section on language as a group marker, social status and regional variation are discussed as they relate to language variation. The discussion of contextual parameters of language use examines micro and macro sociolinguistic phenomena and reviews literature that considers the phenomena of code switching, diglossia, and attitudes toward the use of language. Implications of socially stigmatizing particular groups because of their language are also discussed. It is contended that, as language use is situational, it is unrealistic to expect that everyone conform to one particular set of English language norms. (GC)

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# Attitudes Toward English Vernaculars

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Paper presented at the conference "Meeting the Educational Needs of Students Who Speak a Vernacular English in the Public School Setting." June 2-3, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Jointly sponsored by the National Institute of Education and the Ann Arbor Public Schools. Order #NIE-P-80-0042.

CS021034

# Attitudes Toward English Vernaculars

## Introduction

English is a world language. Of that there can be little doubt. One has only to examine history to recognize how far reaching its use has been extended. England is not only responsible for planting colonies that would grow into English speaking nations (the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand); but for imposing its rule and language in the British West Indies (where English has become the standard language), India, Southeast Asia, and Africa (where English is used with other indigenous languages) (Robinson & Bailey, 1973).

The function of language in society is not only a manifestation of how that society's interaction networks are organized, but an indication of its behavior and attitude toward language. Language contact situations are one context in which the function a society assigns to language is most obvious. For example, when cultures with different languages establish trade relations or when one country imposes itself militarily or exploitatively on another country with a differing language, the context gives rise to a situation that necessitates the development of a common means of communication. Out of these language contact situations grow pidgin languages. Pidgins reflect the structure and lexicon of the languages from which they have been derived, and provide a means of wider communication between two (or more) societies in contact. If continued relations exist between the cultures in contact, and new generations are born and speak the pidgin as their primary language (as opposed to one of

the languages of the contact cultures), this pidgin now becomes a creole language. Further historical development of a creole in a language contact situation can give rise to a dialect (a subsystem of a language) or a vernacular (an independent language system sharing similar characteristics with another language). One function that a dialect or vernacular language system must come to accommodate is its role as a symbol of group identification. Additionally, the use of this dialect or vernacular will reflect society's behavior and attitude toward language.

The spread of English as a world language has resulted in many and diverse language contact situations. This in turn has given rise to a variety of English based language systems, inclusive of creoles, dialects, and vernaculars. The attitudes delimiting the role and function of these language systems might be best understood via an examination of the basic sociolinguistic concepts that describe: (a) societal behavior toward language, (b) language as a group marker, and (c) the contextual parameters of language use.

Societal Behavior Toward Language and the Acquisition of Verbal Repetoires

The basic question we want to examine is: What are the various means that society uses to indicate the greater value that is accorded some language varieties more than others?

Fishman (1972) points out that one behavior toward language that implies a society's value of one vernacular over another is standardization. This involves the codification and acceptance (within the community of users) of a formal set of norms defining "correct" usage (Stewart, 1968).

Codification is developed via scribes, storytellers, grammarians, teachers, and writers, whose use of language is professional and conscious. This codification is presented to the speech community through grammars, dictionaries, spellers, style manuals, and exemplary texts--written or oral. The acceptance of the formally codified variety of language is advanced by such agencies and authorities as the government, the educational system, mass media, religious institutions, and the cultural establishment. As a result, the standard variety becomes associated with such institutions, the types of interactions most commonly associated with them, and the values or goals they represent (Fishman, 1972).

Autonomy, historicity, and vitality are three additional qualities attributed to language that might help to explain how society accords one language system greater value than another.

When a language system is unique and independent, it is felt to be autonomous. A society's belief of how its language developed explains the notion of historicity. It is through this quality that positive or negative attitudes toward a language can be historically defined. Standardized language varieties in reality cannot boast a more "respectable" ancestry than non-standardized varieties. The negative subjective reactions that once accompanied the use of the former are distanced from its current users by time. Speakers of the more recently developed vernaculars are still victims of societal impressions that the non-standard varieties represent a recent, make-shift language, developed from some other well known, lexically related variety, in this case Standard English. Finally

the interaction networks that require a language variety's use natively for one or more vital functions suggests its vitality. The more numerous and important the native speakers of a particular variety are, the greater its vitality and potential for standardization, autonomy, and historicity. Conversely, the fewer the number and the lower the status of the native speakers of a variety, the more it is reacted to as if it were somehow a defective or contaminated instrument, unworthy of serious efforts or functions, and lacking in proper parentage or uniqueness (Stewart, 1968).

Table 1 outlines the seven types of language varieties that can be identified based on the attributes of standardization, autonomy, historicity and vitality.

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Insert Table 1 about here.

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The attribute differentiating a standard from a vernacular is that of codification. Vernaculars are usually learned as first or native languages, but because they lack formalized grammars and lexicons they are accorded less prestige than standard languages. Additionally, if there are questions regarding a vernacular's autonomy, historicity or vitality, it will be accorded even less prestige. Black English (BE) serves as a case in point. BE has not been codified, in that there is no formal set of norms defining "correct" usage. While linguists have tried to describe its grammar, and authors have used it as a means of expression, there are no exemplary texts of BE. Furthermore, it has not been advanced via any major societal agency. BE is autonomous, yet its historicity, its close structural relation to Standard English (SE), and

its ancestral connection with slavery are sources of negative attitudes toward the language system. Additionally, although its use is widespread, the low status accorded its speakers to some degree threatens its vitality.

The means by which the participants in a speech community acquire their verbal repetoire provides an additional aspect of societal behavior from which to examine those language varieties accorded greater value over others. Large, diversified speech communities often have within their verbal repetoires language varieties that are experientially learned, referentially learned, or both. Experientially learned languages are acquired and reinforced by actual verbal interaction within particular networks. Referentially learned languages are acquired and reinforced through symbolic integration within reference networks which may seldom or never be actualized. Some speech communities are preserved because they employ only experientially acquired language varieties. Others are preserved by the force of symbolic integration accompanying referentially acquired language varieties. Yet both phenomenon may occur simultaneously within a speech community.

When a speech community uses a referentially acquired language variety, it is generally a standardized language that is accorded that role. It is the variety that stands for a nation's most exalted institutions (government, education, and culture), and helps unite people into a symbolic speech community.

In the U.S. many social and regional variations of English exist side by side. Many varieties such as network standard and Boston English

are acceptable. Others such as Brooklynese, BE, and Appalachian English are not widely acceptable outside of the smaller community where they are used as a means of communication. Yet the nation as a whole can be considered one speech community by its referential access to Standard English. On the other hand, the social and regional variations of English which are experientially acquired are preserved because of social and geographical barriers to communication. Within each of the embedded language communities there exists speakers whose verbal repetoires include either the social or regional variety, or the standard variety, or both.

Thus the manner in which language is functionally acquired (experientially or symbolically) and the status it is societally assigned can be examined as descriptors of a society's attitude toward a language variety. Those languages accorded high status are presented by, advanced by, and associated with the formal agencies of a society including government education, religion, and culture. They are also the potential unifying vehicle of speech communities that do not share the same language varieties or manifest variation within the same variety. It must be noted, however, that any language or language variety has the potential to be given status. In many societies it is political dominance that determines which language will receive status, in others it is political expediency.

Language as a Group Marker

Societies attach value not only to entire language varieties, but to particular features of language varieties. Phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical variants are often linguistic markers of one's regional ties and social status.

Regional variation in language occurs because populations are separated from one another as a result of political, but usually geographical barriers such as mountains, jungles, desserts, and rivers. These barriers limit travel, commerce, and common endeavor. Social variation in language is associated with differences in social class, religion, style, age, sex or ethnic affiliation. When physical barriers can be overcome and access to isolated geographical areas is made easily available, variation in language can be maintained via the socio-cultural forces.

Language and linguistic features often become markers of regional ties and social status through association. A language variety that becomes the standard generally does so as a codified set of norms that are socially acceptable to the most prestigious social class in a society (Wolfram & Fasold, 1972). By providing a codified set of norms for correctness, a standard language provides a basis from which speakers can be judged with respect to their conformity to that norm.

In a like fashion specific phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical features serve as regional markers. Certain dialect areas called focal areas serve as centers for linguistic spread. Urban centers that gain cultural and regional prestige serve as focal points from where linguistic spread emigrates. The more advantaged classes are more likely to have a major influence over dialect features that spread outward from focal points.

It is felt that (Wolfram & Fasold, 1972) evaluative responses made with respect to language are fundamentally responses to social differences

that language differences imply. The speech behavior of a socially stigmatized group will be considered stigmatized; the speech behavior of a socially prestigious group will be considered high-prestige.

Examples of Regional and Social Variation in Language

Regional variation in language is usually marked by differences in phonological or lexical differences. The following regions may be characterized by their speech: (a) Eastern United States coastal areas from Maine to South Carolina; (b) the Great Lakes states including Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio; (c) the north-central states and the upper midwest; (d) Northern and Southern Rocky Mountain areas; (e) the Southwest; (f) California; and (g) the Pacific Northwest. The following are examples of urban focal points within dialect regions: Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Charleston, Memphis, Chicago, and San Francisco.

Regional and social dialects are set off by phonological, grammatical, and lexical variants. Appalachian English, Hawaiian English,and Gullah are examples of both regional and social dialects, marking one's regional ties as well as his/her social status.

Appalachian English is that variety of English most typically associated with the working class, rural population found in Appalachia. The geographical boundaries of this area include parts of Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and all of West Virginia. Originally geographical barriers set Appalachia apart as a separate region. This barrier has since been overcome, but the language of the area is maintained because of socio-cultural forces including lifestyle and socio-economic status.

Hawaiian English (HE) is the language of a variety of racial groups called non-Haoles who share the same schooling, and like economic and social circumstances. Although the use of HE marks the solidarity of the speech community, it is viewed negatively by its speakers because of the low prestige it receives by most of the influential people of Hawaii, including the educated, refined Americans, and school teachers in particular. The roots of this negative feeling toward HE lie in its origin as a pidgin, and its current social and racial associations.

Gullah is another example of a regional and social dialect. It can be characterized as a more creolized variety of Black English and it is spoken by Black communities on the Sea Islands and on coastal areas of South Carolina and Georgia. Its social and racial association with Blacks, and its origin as a pidgin are negative attributes of the language.

Black English, the language system of Mexican-Americans, and New York City English serve as instances of social dialects.

BE is spoken by U.S. Blacks of high or low status in rural or urban regions. Because of the negative stereotype associated with Blacks, use of BE or sounding Black causes one to be socially stigmatized. As well, accented English as spoken by many Mexican-Americans is the basis of being socially stigmatized because of the negative stereotype associated with Mexican-Americans. Finally, in Labov's classic work on the social stratification of English in New York City (1966) it was found that five particular phonological features were markers of social class in New York City. The phonological features in question were used among both the

lower and upper classes. What differentiated the social classes was the degree to which the variables were realized in certain ways on particular occasions. It was generally felt that if one could be identified as a New Yorker on the basis of his speech this was tantamount to being stigmatized as a New Yorker.

Linguistic markers of regional ties or social status reflect just how complex attitudes toward language are. Regional and social variants are often viewed negatively by outsiders as well as group members. Yet these stigmatized variants when used in the appropriate social context are positively valued by the group members and serve as the parameters for group membership. In this fashion socio-cultural forces maintain language variation and to an extent provide language barriers.

Contextual Parameters of Language Use

The basic sociolinguistic constructs of social situation and diglossia describe language use in differing social contexts, and point up the attitudes shared by speech communities that help define context appropriate language use.

Fishman (1972) points out that in sociolinguistics, language can be studied on two levels, that of microsociolinguistics and that of macro-sociolinguistics. The former considers how the components of the social situation--role relationships, setting and topic--affect language use. Role relationships are implicitly recognized and accepted sets of mutual rights and obligations between members of the same sociocultural system. They are revealed via variation in the way members of the group talk to

each other. In addition, the significance of the setting and topic most appropriate to the role relationship is also shown via the language used between group members.

One particular language behavior that illustrates the significance of the interaction between the components of the social situation is code-switching. Code-switching involves the use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation, possibly including the use of genetically unrelated languages or two styles of the same language. Code-switching can be situational or metaphorical in nature. Situational switching signals a change in the participants' definition of the social event. It is governed by the widespread normative views and regulations that commonly assign a particular variety to a particular cluster of topics, places, persons, or purposes. Metaphorical switching signals a change in the subject matter under discussion, and emphasizes a departure from the usual association of a language with a situation type that is normally operative. When one language variety is used in a new, and often unexpected context, it becomes socially marked, and the values associated with the original context are mapped onto the new message. Thus the point the speaker is making is given greater emphasis.

One example of situational switching might involve two BE speakers gossiping in BE, and switching to SE to discuss a work related topic. The switch emphasizes that the speakers have observed the norms that influence language use. We may infer that there is a shared set of mutual rights and obligations between the two speakers in the particular speaking contexts that allows and requires informal conversations to be spoken

in BE and more formal conversations to be spoken in SE. An interesting case of metaphorical switching is the style of the book Talkin and Testifyin by Geneva Smitherman (1977). The book is a scholarly description of the language system of Black Americans. When the author makes a point and wants to emphasize it, she makes the point first in SE, and again in BE for emphasis. A participant in the BE oral tradition can recognize and appreciate the strength of the reiteration, for in the tradition repetition is often used for emphasis. Mcreover, while there is no topic shift there is a shift in mode (literary to oral) associating the values of the original literary context with the new oral context and further emphasizing the point.

While the three components role relationships, setting, and topic comprise the construct of social situation, the aggregate of the same kinds of social situations, appropriate to different societally recognized functions, comprises the construct of domain--the inquiry of language at the level of macrosociolinguistics. Domains specify those seemingly different social situations as being recognized as the same by each speech network of the community. Domain appropriate role relationships, settings and topics are thus specified by the classification of those similar social situations found to have congruence between their three components. Some relevant domains for describing language use in many multilingual societies would include family, friendship, religion, education, work sphere, and government.

Attitudes toward the use of language can be examined via the description of how particular speech varieties are distributed for intrasocietal communication based on these domains of behavior. One particular instance

of the patterned distribution of language varieties is described by diglossia. Societies characterized by diglossia separate languages, dialects, registers, or differentiated language varieties (Ferguson, 1959) to communicate two existing classes of complementary values, attitudes and behaviors. There are L-related (low) values of intimacy, solidarity, spontaneity and informality, that are related to the home and friendship domains. The complement of L-related values are H-related (high) values which emphasize status differences, ritual, and formality, related to religion, education, and government. Language varieties or codes associated with L-related values are generally learned first in an informal setting, such as the home, while varieties that are H-related are learned later in a more formal setting such as school.

Diglossic situations seem to be manifest in several speech communities where vernacular varieties of English are used, among Black English speakers, bilingual Mexican-Americans, and Hawaiian English speakers, and describe the language attitudes shared by members of the speech community.

Several studies have described and illustrated a diglossic like pattern of language use within the BE speech community of the U.S. (Labov, 1968; Mitchell-Kernan, 1972; Abrahams, 1972; Straker, 1978). BE is learned in the home and spoken with close friends and relatives. Its use signals that the speakers sharing the social situation also share feelings of intimacy, solidarity, and interpret the situation as being informal. Wide exposure to interactions requiring SE may take place in

a formal setting such as school. Its use marks the status relations of the speakers sharing the social situation, and marks the situation as being formal. Using BE appropriately for such speech events as marking, signifying, rapping, or relating a narrative of personal experience is an overt indication of one's verbal adeptness. Using SE appropriately in formal situations emphasizes one's intelligence and understanding of linguistic etiquette. However, to use SE when BE is required is an indication that the speaker is "putting on airs" and being unnecessarily proper. Likewise, to use BE in a social situation requiring SE marks one as being ignorant.

In many Mexican-American communities in the southwest U.S. the diglossic pattern of language behavior is recognized via the use of Spanish, English, and the alternation between the two. Many Mexican-Americans are rejected by the dominant Anglo culture and simultaneously find themselves outsiders in their own Spanish-speaking culture. These stresses of culture are reflected in attitudes toward language use. The linguistic functions that once were served by Spanish are now divided between Spanish, English, and a combination of the two (Barker, 1972). Spanish is the language of intimate family relations. Its use reflects the speaker's need to cling to ethnic traditions. English is the language of formal social relations, and all relations with Anglos. Those interested in fighting discrimination and rising in social status, strive for mastery of English and refrain from using Spanish or speaking English with a Spanish accent. Curranza and Ryan (1975) conducted a study among

Mexican-American and Anglo high school students to determine their evaluative reactions toward speakers of Standard English and Spanish in the context of home and school, and on the dimensions of solidarity and status. As expected, it was found that the Mexican-American students rated the use of Spanish more favorably in the home context and the use of English more favorably in the school context. However, English was rated higher in association with both status and solidarity dimensions indicating perhaps a context of unstable bilingualism and how highly valued the use of English is. Informal relations with bilinguals are marked by a mixture of Spanish and English, or a rapid alternation between the two. Formal Spanish is used only by those Mexican-Americans whose social relations include contact with Mexicans from Mexico (Barker, 1972).

Reinecke's study (1969) of Hawaiian English (HE) up to 1935 illustrates the diglossic pattern of language use between what he calls colonial dialect and Standard English. Hawaiian English is most unique having been influenced by English, Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, Puerto Rican Spanish, Philippine languages, and Hawaiian language. A short history indicates that between 1820 and 1880, at the same time that Hawaiian English and Chinese were the languages of the land, a Hawaiian-based pidgin possibly arose. From about 1880 on an English-based pidgin developed among the speakers of all the various languages on the scene. By about 1910 Hawaiian English dialect was established (Glissmeyer, 1973).

HE marks the we-group for non-Haoles, and as such it serves as an emotional bond. Yet HE is viewed negatively by its speakers because of the low prestige it receives by most of the influential people of Hawaii:

the educated, refined Americans, and in particular school teachers. The roots of this negative evaluation of HE lie with its origins as a pidgin and creole, and its present social, racial and economic associations. With SE being the norm, HE is the uncultured, degenerated variant of that norm. Native speakers of SE are contemptuous of HE speakers, feeling superior in their linguistic ability and feeling that HE is properly the speech of a different race of people who are socially inferior, and imperfectly assimilated Americans. The reaction of the speaker of HE is to be defensive regarding his speech. The further a HE speaker moves ahead in life, in and out of school, the more carefully he is taught to draw distinctions between when it is acceptable or not acceptable to use colonial dialect. Those who are able to adapt their speech to the social situation are contemptuous of those who cannot, yet they feel that the habitual use of near Standard English (careful speech) among themselves is presumptuous, snobbish, and a dissociation of oneself from one's class. On the other hand, too careless speech, even among one's own nationality is considered unbefitting educated non-Haoles. Thus in formal situations a non-Haole person of status (a teacher) is under obligation to speak good English. But in more informal, intimate settings he/she may use HE. An outsider's attempt to use HE might easily be interpreted as condescending behavior.

The participants of a speech community share attitudes that help define context appropriate language use. The positive consequences a speaker experiences for using language appropriate to the social context usually involves his/her being recognized as a group member sharing in the specified norms that delimit formal or informal behavior. The negative

consequences usually involve the speaker being viewed as arrogant, condescending or snobbish, nevertheless, a group member. The situation is somewhat different when outsiders manifest subjective reactions toward speakers using language varieties which identify them as belonging to a particular group. The negative consequences associated with these attitudes are of a different sort, emphasizing the negative stereotypes that perpetuate socio-cultural barriers between people. Language attitude studies examining subjective reactions toward the language of Blacks, and the English of New York City residents point up the disadvantages a speaker experiences because his/her language associates him/her with a particular group.

Several studies (Tucker & Lambert, 1973; Fraser, 1973; Shuy, 1973; Williams & Shuy, 1973; Rist, 1970; Williams, 1969) examining subjective reactions to BE indicated that not only were BE speakers judged less favorably than SE speakers, the use of BE marked one as being from a lower class and having diminished abilities, and was an important contributor to bias in employment and education.

In three studies (Lambert & Tucker, 1973; Shuy & Williams, 1973; Fraser, 1973) that tested Black and White reactions to various English dialects the results suggested that judges were not only able to differentiate between dialect groups, but indicated a marked preference for two dialect varieties--Network English, the typical speaking mode of national newscasters, and British English--over the other dialects used in the comparison. These other dialects included: (a) college-educated White southern speech; (b) college-educated Black southern speech (Lambert & Tucker, 1973);

Detroit speech, White southern speech, Black speech, and standard speech (Shuy & Williams, 1973). Moreover, it was illustrated that if one sounds Black, whether he/she is or not, he/she will be held in lower esteem than if one sounds White. Sounding Black, educated or otherwise, carries no prestige among White raters.

In a study conducted to examine speech as a criterion for employability, the negative consequences of being able to be identified by one's speech were again illustrated. Among 16 judges who did hiring for various Washington, D.C. employers representing approximately 40,000 various types of jobs, it was generally felt that speech was directly proportionate to employability. When the judges were asked to rank speakers with respect to job categories, the well-educated speakers of the highest actual categories were consistently rated as holding positions in lower categories. Additionally, the more standard speakers were rated as having the capability to hold the better jobs while the less standard speakers were more often judged as unemployable. Finally, even if a Black speaker were actually highly educated, on the basis of his being linguistically identifiably Black he was judged to hold a position lower than he held in reality.

In the educational context teachers' subjective reactions toward Black students based on language use has the potential to seriously impede learning.

In a study conducted by Williams (1969) it was demonstrated that ethnic and social-status differences in the U.S. have their correlates in speech attitudes, presumably social stereotyping. From this study that

elicited teachers' attitudes toward children's speech, the researchers were able to suggest that after hearing a very brief portion of a child's speech a stereotype was elicited in the teacher and she used this more than her detailed perceptions of the child's speech as a basis for overall judgments about the child. The White teachers' image of a low-status, disadvantaged child was more likely to be one whose speech they would rate in the direction of being non-standard and ethnic. When a child who was actually Black was rated as having high status, he/she was also rated as White.

Rist's study (1970), reporting the effects of the self-fulfilling prophecy on students' performance in a ghetto school demonstrated that a kindergarten teacher's subjective determination of a child's academic potential and capability, with language being one of the key attributes, affected that child's ability and opportunity to achieve at the kindergarten through second grade levels. Rist (1970) reports that the children were placed in reading groups according to such subjective characteristics as appearance (clean or dirty), manner of interaction among themselves and with the teacher, the use of Standard English (SE) or Black English (BE), and the social class factors of income, family education, and family size--known to the teacher prior to the student's school admission. Those students who were positively evaluated by the teacher as having desirable characteristics were grouped together. They received positive reinforcement from and participated in positive interaction with the teacher, allowing them

to succeed. Those students who were negatively evaluated by the teacher as having undesirable characteristics were also grouped together. They received negative reinforcement from the teacher and for the most part their presence in the class was ignored. This pattern of grouping and preferential treatment was maintained by other teachers throughout the second grade. While the teacher's attitude towards these students was based on several factors, it must be noted that one of the key factors was language.

Labov's classic study of the social statification of English in New York City (1966) was able to illustrate that New Yorkers recognize the use of particular phonological variants as prestige norms or stigmatized language features. Yet this recognition did not seem to mitigate the use of the socially stigmatized forms in those contexts where the speaker wanted to demonstrate identification with one of the subgroups of the social complex. From this study Labov was also able to determine the effect of social mobility on linguistic behavior. He found that people who can be identified as mobile adopt the norms of the next higher group with which they are in contact. Groups that can be identified as socially stable tend to be governed more by their own linguistic norms. Speakers who can be identified as downwardly mobile deviate not only from the subgroup to which they belong, but do not accept linguistic patterns other segments recognize. There were pressures to conform with middle class norms of speech as well as with peer group norms.

The use of socially stratified dialect features is contextually defined in much the same way as the use of language varieties is contextually defined in diglossic situations.

Speakers in each of the social stratum use either the prestige or the stigmatized linguistic features and this use is partially influenced by the formality or informality of the social situation. This quality of formality along with shared attitudes regarding the rights and obligations of the speakers also influences which language variety is appropriate for the situational context.

Just as social stratification exists among various dialect features, it also exists in the subjective attitudes that people have toward the dialect of others. One's reactions to a dialect may not only reflect his attitudes about the social stratum of that dialect, but may also include clusters of attitudes related to apparent qualities of the dialect or to the people who speak the dialect (Shuy & Williams, 1973).

## Conclusion

Societal attitudes toward language and language use can be understood by recognizing the social organization of the speech community and the role the community assigns to language. The historical development of American culture has involved joining peoples from diverse cultures as one. Yet each of the various ethnic groups have maintained aspects of its traditional culture, very often reflected in language use. This along with particular social groups and geographical locations being associated with power and prestige has created a unique language situation.

Standard English has been designated as the language variety that symbolizes the culture as a whole. It is the language of government, education, mass media, and religion. All Americans are linguistically unified by the referential access each speaker has to Standard English. However, social-cultural and regional barriers have contributed to the linguistic variation that exists within the American English speech community, and this variation is maintained via each speaker's experiential access to the language of the social group or region to which he belongs. As a result, a speaker's use of English can specify his/her geographic ties as well as his/her social affiliation.

In the context of geographical or social variation we are able to examine the attitudes embedded groups share toward language use within their speech communities, and the attitudes that the mainstream culture exhibits toward language variation. Among all speakers, but especially obvious among BE speakers, HE speakers, and Mexican-American bilinguals for example, the shared norms that govern language use are defined with respect to the social situation--the rights and obligations of the role relationships, the topic of conversation, the situation or setting, and the status or solitarity value and is experientially acquired. Group membership is marked by one's recognition of and ability to adhere to the shared norms designating context appropriate language use.

Very often in this diglossic type situation the social or regional variant that symbolizes group membership is socially stigmatized because of its association with a particular group or area. Society's negative

subjective reactions to regional or social language variation reinforces the positive role assigned the culture's standard variety, but does so by implying that the only correct norm of language use is the standard variety--Standard English. Given the widespread variation in English use this notion is unrealistic and only perpetuates existing barriers between embedded cultures and the mainstream society. All groups sharing referential access to Standard English recognize the appropriate norms of use associated with the variety, and value the prestige and status it commands when used in the appropriate contexts. Yet because language variation is a reflection of the cultural and social variation within our society, no one language nor any one style of a language variety is suitable for all social contexts.

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Table 1

The Attributes of Different Types of Language Varieties

(Fishman, 1972)

| Attributes[a] | | | | Variety Type |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| + | + | + | + | Standard |
| - | + | + | + | Vernacular |
| - | - | + | + | Dialect |
| - | - | - | + | Creole |
| - | - | - | - | Pidgin |
| + | + | + | - | Classical |
| + | + | - | - | Artificial |

[a] 1 = standardization
2 = autonomy
3 = historicity
4 = vitality